



"We at VA have an opportunity to set a new standard for quality in health care ethics. I urge each of you to join me in becoming personally involved in this important work."

--Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP

Under Secretary for Health

Washington, DC

What is **IntegratedEthics**?

IntegratedEthics is an innovative national education and organizational change initiative that provides VA facilities with the tools they need to transform their traditional ethics committees into IntegratedEthics programs that better match their needs.

Why do we need **IntegratedEthics**?

Surveys carried out by the National Center for Ethics in Health Care have confirmed that VA employees:

- Encounter ethics problems every day
- View ethics as essential to health care quality
- Want tools and resources to address ethics

While every VA medical center has an ethics committee, these committees are highly variable with respect to their policies, activities, and perceived effectiveness.

"We have data indicating that ethics committees in VA have significant opportunities for improvement. Our goal should be to raise the bar on health care ethics quality throughout our system."

--Ellen Fox, MD

Director, National Center for Ethics in Health Care
Washington, DC

"Our staff is committed to ethical practices but we could definitely use some help. Health care is rapidly changing. Our ethics committee needs to change as well."

--Gwendolyn Gillespie, MSN, APRN, BC

Ethics Committee Chairperson, VA Medical Center
Cincinnati, OH

What is an **IntegratedEthics** program?

An IntegratedEthics program is a local mechanism designed to continuously improve a health care organization's ethics quality.

Ethics quality encompasses health care practices at three levels: decisions and actions, systems and processes, and environment and culture.

How does an **IntegratedEthics** program work?

An IntegratedEthics program improves ethics quality by integrating three core functions:

- **Ethics Consultation:** responding to ethical concerns in health care
- **Preventive Ethics:** addressing ethical issues on a systems level
- **Ethical Leadership:** fostering a positive health care ethics environment

How a facility chooses to carry out these functions will vary according to local needs. The structure of an IntegratedEthics program reflects the adage “form follows function.” The idea is that each facility will build on the strengths of its existing ethics program to meet the goals of IntegratedEthics.

“To convince people that ethics is important you have to demonstrate that ethics is a consideration in the most important decisions. You have to deal with it at the corporate and executive level.”

--Susan Bowers
Director, VA Medical Center
Indianapolis, IN

“Recurring ethics cases can be a persistent source of anxiety for the organization, and considerable amounts of staff time may be required to address them. Creating a mechanism to examine these issues, systematically, promises to benefit the organization by resolving conflict and providing clear ethics guidance.”

--Michael J. Miller, MD, PhD
Chief Medical Officer, VISN 1
Bedford, MA

How is an **IntegratedEthics** program different from an ethics committee?

The IntegratedEthics initiative establishes a new paradigm for achieving excellence in ethics through organizational change:

Ethics Committee	IntegratedEthics Program
Traditional model, established circa 1980	New model for 21st century
Isolated, “silo,” limited staff participation	Integrated, visible, well-connected
Reactive, case-based	Proactive, systems-focused
<i>Ad hoc</i> , variable processes	Systematic, clear standards and guidelines
Limited assessment of effectiveness	Improvement-oriented, accountable
Focused on narrow range of health care ethics problems	Covers broad spectrum, including organizational ethics

“The absence of an effective integrated ethics structure means we sometimes fail to make the connections we should be making... We should be looking for opportunities to move ethics out from the ethics committee into the work of everyone who serves our veterans.”

--James Scheurich, MD
Deputy Chief of Staff, Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center
Houston, TX

How comprehensive is an **IntegratedEthics** program?

An IntegratedEthics program aims to improve practices across a broad range of health care ethics domains, including:

- Health care ethics environment
- Shared decision making
- End-of-life care
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Professionalism
- Resource allocation

“Our patient ethics committee is helpful as far as resolving conflicts over clinical treatment for individuals. But there are a lot of other ethical issues facing the facility that just seem to fall through the cracks and never get addressed. We need a more comprehensive approach.”

--Gordon Starkebaum, MD
Chief of Staff, VA Medical Center
Seattle, WA

How can a facility implement an **IntegratedEthics** program?

A leadership team from each interested facility attends a one-day kickoff workshop. At the workshop, facilities receive a comprehensive IntegratedEthics toolbox that equips them to implement a program tailored to their own needs and existing structures. This toolbox includes:

- IntegratedEthics how-to manual
- IntegratedEthics communications materials
- Primers on each of the three core functions
- Video courses on each of the three core functions
- IntegratedEthics assessment tools

In addition, facilities engaged in the IntegratedEthics initiative join a virtual community for ongoing education and support:

- Web site
- Online courses
- Software to track ethics consultations
- Teleconferences
- Discussion board
- Technical support

Find out more!

For more information contact:
National Center for Ethics in Health Care
810 Vermont Ave NW (10E)
Washington, DC 20420

vaww.va.gov/IntegratedEthics